

OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL STATE OF ILLINOIS

Lisa Madigan  
ATTORNEY GENERAL

December, 2012

RE: Illinois Automated Victim Notification (AVN) System - 2012 Status and Updates

Dear Honorable Members of the Illinois Legislature:

The Crime Victim and Witness Notification Advisory Committee (AVN Committee) was created in 1999 to assist the Office of the Illinois Attorney General in the implementation of the Illinois Automated Victim Notification System (AVN system). [725 ILCS 120/8.5 (g)]. The AVN Committee is charged with evaluating the operation of the system and reporting its activities and status to the General Assembly each year. As Chairman of the AVN Committee, I am pleased to provide you with an exciting update on the operation and enhancement of the Illinois AVN system.

**The Illinois AVN System Basics:**

The Illinois Automated Victim Notification System provides information about changes in an offender's custodial status and court case status. Victims, witnesses, family members, law enforcement officers, probation officers, and interested members of the public can request bilingual (English/Spanish) telephone and/or email notifications. The services are free to users and are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The Illinois AVN is a critical element in ensuring that law enforcement officials, the Department of Corrections, and prosecutors fulfill their constitutional and statutory mandates to notify victims of changes in an offender's custodial status and upcoming court dates. [See Article I, section 8.1 (a) of the Illinois Constitution, delineating the rights of crime victims, and the implementation legislation contained in the Rights of Crime Victims and Witnesses Act, 725 ILCS 120/4 and 4.5]. The AVN system also affords law enforcement, prosecutors, and victim advocates special access to the system, affording them the opportunity to further assist victims.

The Illinois AVN system provides these valuable notifications via a computer interface with county jail booking systems, the Illinois Department of Corrections, and circuit court clerks throughout the state. The Illinois AVN system transfers information from these sources to a centralized communication center, which in turn, generates timely telephone and email updates to any individual who is a registered user of

the system. Presently there are 87 jails, 95 court systems and the Illinois Department of Corrections participating in AVN. Efforts this year focused on obtaining the participation of the Department of Human Services (DHS). DHS provides the notifications to crime victims related to offenders in DHS custody that are currently mandated by the Rights of Crime Victims and Witnesses Act, as well as the new notifications mandated by P.A. 97- 815, effective January 1, 2013.

The registration process for the Illinois AVN system is relatively simple. Victims, witnesses and other interested parties call a toll-free number: 1-866-5-NOTIFY (1866-566-8439), (TTY-I-877-502-2423), or register online at [www.vinelink.com](http://www.vinelink.com) (commonly referred to as "VINELink"). The toll-free telephone registration and notifications as well as the email notifications are available in English and Spanish.

Users who register for phone notification are required to select a four-digit Personal Identification Number (PIN), which allows the Illinois AVN system to monitor when the intended recipient has received notification of the requested event. If the correct PIN is not entered at the time of the call, the system will continue to attempt to make notification calls as often as every 30 minutes for 24 hours, allowing the user to correct their PIN entry. At any point in the process, users may connect to a live operator for assistance. All e-mail notifications are sent to an email of the user's choice.

In addition, law enforcement, prosecutors, and victim advocates can request access to a restricted area of the AVN system not accessible to victims or the general public. This part of the system, referred to as "VINEWatch," allows criminal justice personnel and victim advocates to register victims, update registrations, run registration and notification reports, prepare statistical AVN usage reports, conduct emergency override procedures, and conduct offender and case searches.

Since its implementation in 2001, the Illinois AVN system has provided information to 543,873 registered users. As of December 1, 2012, the Illinois AVN system has access to custody information for approximately 60,991 offenders and case status information for over 664,474 open criminal court cases. As of December 1, 2012, there were 308,152 active registered users. It is clear that the system is successful as the number of registration requests continues to rise each year. During fiscal year 2012, the system provided 192,546 telephonic notifications and 20,165 email notifications. As noted earlier, this service is completely secure and free-of-charge to the users.

### **New AVN Initiatives**

In late 2011, the Office of the Illinois Attorney General applied for and was awarded a SAVIN grant from the United States Department of Justice in the amount of \$861,568.00. The two-year grant will fund three enhancements: (1) add text messaging as a third method of notification; (2) fund an interface so the Department of Human Services can provide automated statutorily-mandated notifications to victims when an offender is committed to the custody of the DHS after a finding that the offender is NGRI or a sexually violent person; and (3) upgrade 29 county jail interfaces. In addition, the grant will provide a survey tool to capture and measure user satisfaction.

Text messaging went live on October 11, 2012. The Department of Human Services facilities that house criminal offenders who have been found not guilty by reason of insanity or are sexually violent

persons have installed an interface that will allow for victim notifications. It is anticipated that the system will go live and that victims will be able to register for notifications in December.

Work is underway on the upgrades of the 29 county jail interfaces. As of December 1, 2012, four of the upgrades had been installed. The interface work is expected to be complete in October 2013.

### **On-going AVN Operational Costs**

The operating costs for the current AVN system are disbursed from the Violent Crime Victims Assistance fund. The Violent Crime Victims Assistance Act imposes a fine on persons convicted of criminal offenses and certain offenses listed in the Illinois Vehicle Code. These fines are deposited in the Violent Crime Victims Assistance Fund, which is used not only for the AVN system, but also for grants to programs that provide services to crime victims. [725 ILCS 240/1 et. seq.]

### **Sex Offender Notifications**

In 2008, the General Assembly amended the Sex Offender Community Notification Act [730 ILCS 152/1 *et. seq.*] to require county sheriffs to provide victims of sex offenses certain information relating to sex offenders. Given the success of the AVN system at notifying victims of changes in an offender's custodial status and court case status, the Attorney General applied for and received funding in 2009 from the Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs SAVIN Grant Program (Statewide Automated Victim Information and Notification) to enhance the existing Illinois AVN system to include notifications relating to sex offenders. County sheriffs and local police departments were provided sex offender management software used to register and monitor sex offenders' status. The VCVA fund has been steadily declining over the past several years, so a different source of funding was needed for operational costs. Sex offender registration fees were increased from \$30 to \$100 on January 1, 2011, in part to provide for the operational costs associated with the notifications related to sex offenders. Only a small number of law enforcement agencies actually collect the registration fee. As a result, there are insufficient funds to currently provide these notifications.

### **Additional Information of Note**

The AVN system is a significant factor in insuring victim safety in an efficient and cost-effective manner. It has been a great success, as evidenced by the increase in the number of victims using the system. AVN serves as a valuable resource to assist law enforcement, prosecutors, and court personnel as they carry out their constitutional and statutory duties to notify victims of crime of changes in an offender's custody status and upcoming court dates.

To ensure the public is aware of this valuable service, staff from Attorney General Lisa Madigan's office provides training to agency users on the features and benefits of the Illinois AVN system. In addition, the Attorney General's staff distributes brochures, fact sheets, and other materials about the system to interested parties throughout the state. Training and a fact sheet on VINE Watch are available to law enforcement, prosecutors, and victim advocates.

If you have any questions about the existing Illinois AVN system or the new enhancements, or would like additional information about how this system effectively serves the victims and witnesses of

violent crime in your district, please do not hesitate to contact Mike Bastien at 618/529-6405 or Cynthia Hora at 312/814-1427 of the Attorney General's Office.

Requests for free brochures or other resource materials for distribution in your local and Springfield offices may be made through Mr. Bastien.

On behalf of the AVN Committee, we thank Attorney General Madigan for providing this invaluable service to the citizens of Illinois.

Sincerely,

Mr. Greg Sullivan  
Chairman,  
Crime Victim and Witness Notification Advisory Committee